

Lexical Blends in Greek and Latin Comedic Idiom

The purpose of this paper is to discuss lexical blending in Greek and Latin comedic idiom. Blending is a process of word-formation in which (typically) two separate source-words are telescoped into a new word form, a so called “lexical blend,” which usually exhibits phonetic overlapping and combines the meaning of both source-words (e.g., English *chortle* which blends chuckle and snort).

The existence of blending in Greek and Latin has never been studied as such, despite the hypothesis that it exists in all languages at all stages of their development (Cannon 1986). It is absent from discussions of word-formation in comprehensive, historical grammars of Greek and Latin (e.g., Schwyzer 1939; Leumann 1977) and from discussions of particular authors’ lexical creativity (e.g. da Costa Ramalho 1952; Duckworth 1994). What attention blending has received is limited to speculations in some dictionaries (e.g., *OLD*; de Vaan 2008) and some remarks amid a larger discussion of punning (Fontaine 2010).

Traditional analyses of word-formation in Greek and Latin focus on two processes: derivation and composition, which are regular, systematic and widely productive in both languages. Yet there are words in Greek and Latin whose formations cannot be well explained through derivation or composition in part because they contain non-morphemic constituents: derivation and composition operate on morphemic constituents such as lexical roots, stem-formants, prefixes and affixes. However, some of the unaccounted-for formations can be explained by lexical blending. Because blending regularly clips source-words at points of phonetic overlap rather than at morphemic boundaries, a resulting lexical blend will consist of non-morphemic elements (e.g., English *chortle* looks like a derivative of **chort* but no such lexical base exists).

Two examples will show the explanatory power of blending, as well as illustrate other features that make blending interesting.

1) οἰκιτιεύς ‘a Kitian house-slave’ (Bion fr. 73 Kindstrand *ap.* Ath. 4.162e) blends οἰκέτης ‘house-slave’ and Κιτιεύς ‘Kitian’. The form of οἰκιτιεύς cannot be accounted for as a conventional compound or grammatical derivative, since there is no base *οἰκιτι- to which -εύς could be added; nor is there a prefix *οἰ- which could be added to Κιτιεύς. As a blend, however, its form and meaning are clear. The phonetic overlap (-κετ- and κιτ-) is exploited to meld the two source-words into a blended word with a combined meaning that serves as the punchline of a joke: that Persaius is not a Kitian student of Zeno (Ζήνωνος Κιτιᾶ) but a Kitian slave of Zeno (Ζήνωνος οἰκετιᾶ).

2) *imbulbitō* ‘defile with manure’ (Lucil. *inc.* 1186 M) is taken by Festus to mean "befoul with baby-shit". Clearly the commentator has understood the salient lexical elements to be forms of *imbuere* ‘drench’ and βόλβιτον ‘manure’ respectively. Note that this would therefore be a bilingual blend and not the only example of such a coinage in the exuberant language of Roman comedy and satire.

From these examples it can be seen that blending does exist in Greek and Latin. Additionally, it will be argued that blends typically originate as nonce-forms for the sake of a quick verbal joke. As such they rarely have an afterlife beyond the specific context of the coinage.

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